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A THREE-YEAR RETARDATION RECORD

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To all who are charged with the administration of school affairs it has long been evident that there are large numbers of children who are behind the schedule set for them, or are "retarded." This is true by whatever method you elect to determine the number or whatever you may believe the causes to be. The undeniable fact is that serious numbers are retarded.

We believe that the amount of retardation is capable of being reduced. Were it otherwise we should face a vast amount of hopeless waste in educating the children.

Probably the most effective way, in the long run, to deal with this question would be wholly to recast the course of study, eliminating that which is irrelevant or non-essential, and adjusting the rest to the actual life-conditions surrounding the children. But that is a work too vast for one man to undertake. The present course of study is the result of the best educational experience of the past. Wide experience and vast educational wisdom would be necessary to attempt a sweeping and constructive revision. Until the man of vision arrives we had better work humbly at the problem of bettering present conditions.

Below, we give a table showing the percentage of retarded pupils, grade by grade, for three years, in the Anoka schools.

	TOTALS			GRADES								Reduction
	Enrolled	Retarded	Per-cent-age	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	
1908-9...	581	407	70.0	37.8	59.4	57.5	70.8	82.2	85.7	75.3	92.2	...
1909-10...	552	363	65.7	37.3	53.8	62.2	68.7	73.3	87.5	80.3	77.5	4.3
1910-11...	510	317	62.1	42.1	43.5	61.9	65.5	68.0	71.2	76.8	73.4	3.6

The reduction shown in the above table is due to no changes in the course of study. In fact, during the time covered by the report, music was introduced into all the grades and manual training, for the boys, into the seventh and eighth grades. Before 1909-10

pupils were promoted if they had only one major study (arithmetic, geography, history, or grammar) below the required passing mark. Beginning with that year they have been obliged to have *all* studies up to grade to win promotion. So the amount of work required is greater and the standard of passing more severe in the years being discussed.

A friend of mine, eminent in political science, frequently asserts that the moment you convince people that a reform is needed, that moment you have virtually effected it; the rest is merely detail to be worked out. That dictum seems true in this case.

The year 1908-9 shows the high total of 70 per cent of the pupils as being retarded. The average for the state of Minnesota, as determined in an extensive investigation, was 58.9 per cent in 1910. So at the beginning of the year 1909-10 the attention of the teachers was called to the conditions and their sympathy and interest enlisted in an effort to reduce the amount of retardation existing. The data presented here shows that a reduction of 4.3 per cent was effected that first year. In the next year a further reduction of 3.6 per cent was brought about. In the following grades the reduction has been continuous: II, IV, V, VIII; in the others it was variable. But, as said before, this reduction of 7.9 per cent in the number of retarded pupils was not due to any radical changes and certainly to no application of soft pedagogy. The reverse. The attention of the teachers was simply directed to the possible relation between retardation and irregular attendance, tardiness, technicalities in examinations, carelessness in coaching the slower pupils, the marking of examinations, care in assigning lessons, the making-up of lost work, and similar matters that lessen a pupil's grasp upon his work or lower his grades. The exercise of greater care and sympathy, and, in general, a greater concern for the individual, rather than so much concern for the "room," has produced some valuable results in more ways than indicated by the table, for such things cannot be reduced to figures.

The gist of the matter is this, we paid just such attention to the elements of loss and waste that would be paid in a careful business enterprise. To reduce to the minimum the loss in so precious a material as the teacher has to deal with would seem to be worth the best efforts of all whose aim is constructive teaching.